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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Perestroika Hits the Military Hard

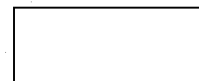
- While Gorbachev has recently given greater weight to military interests, the Soviet military's influence on security policy is at its lowest level in decades.
- The social and systemic turmoil unleashed by reform is lowering military prestige and morale, undermining discipline, and significantly increasing dissatisfaction within the High Command.
- A military coup against Gorbachev is unlikely, but some senior military leaders are seeking common cause with conservative elements in the leadership in an effort to slow the pace of change and rein in social disorder.
- With the exception of its airborne divisions, the Soviet army is ill prepared to assume the unwanted role of domestic policeman; its capability for controlling widespread disorder will be limited even in the non-Slavic republics.

This Executive Brief reflects the views of the Intelligence Community expressed at a meeting on 17 April 1990. It was drafted by the National Intelligence Officer for the USSR and informally coordinated with representatives of CIA, DLA, NSA, and State/INR.

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Over the past several weeks a number of developments have suggested a renaissance of the Soviet military's influence and indicated a greater willingness on Gorbachev's part to defend the military and respond to some of its concerns:

- The military has become more visible in arms control discussions; recent negotiating positions have been more consistent with long-standing military views.
- Defense Minister Yazov was promoted to marshal, reversing Gorbachev's reported policy of reserving this rank for wartime use.
- Draft legislation has been introduced in the Supreme Soviet to enhance the military's status and improve the lot of the Soviet serviceman.
- On 9 May the military staged one of its largest public parades under Gorbachev, in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany.

These developments raise questions once again about the military's role in the Soviet system and its influence on policy. In the Brezhnev period, the military's influence and political standing appeared to be at their peak. It had a priority claim on resources, a leading role in arms control decisionmaking, and strong representation in the political elite.

Eroding Support for Perestroika?

Senior military leaders initially were ambivalent toward *perestroika*. They saw Gorbachev's economic reforms as a means of reversing unfavorable trends threatening to impair future military capabilities. At the same time, they probably recognized that military programs would be under greater constraints than in the past as Gorbachev tried to get the economy and the country

moving again. Gorbachev sought to ensure support for his programs by appointing a new High Command presumably more congenial to his reform efforts. Company and field grade officers in particular have been more receptive to the need for change, and some have endorsed such controversial ideas as a volunteer army.

As the full dimensions of the changes have become evident, however, military unhappiness with *perestroika* has risen dramatically. Gorbachev is facing strong concern in the High Command that his policies are not only antimilitary but are endangering Soviet national security as well.

- Military leaders, particularly General Staff Chief Moiseyev, were sharply critical of the recent draft Party platform for its failure to address military interests.
- Military commanders reportedly see the unilateral withdrawals from Eastern Europe--made against the advice of the High Command--as rash in the face of what they perceive as the continued NATO threat.
- Developments in the Baltic republics have caused alarm; Yazov has decried the freedom accorded "demagogues" to dispense "antiarmy propaganda."
- The virtual collapse of the Warsaw Pact command structure and the prospect of a unified Germany have caused serious dissatisfaction among a High Command still grappling with "reasonable sufficiency."

The military's discomfiture has been compounded by a series of policies affecting the military's perceived institutional prerogatives and interests:

- Significant cuts have been made in military spending and the production of some weapon systems, particularly tanks.

- Civilian experts on security issues, whose views frequently conflict with those of the military leadership now have an increased role in decisionmaking.
- The Soviet press has featured articles sharply critical of the Armed Forces, prompting strong rejoinders from senior military leaders.
- The turmoil in Soviet society--which the military leadership attributes to Gorbachev's programs--has taken an increasing toll on military discipline, morale, prestige, and professionalism.

Revamping the Security Apparatus

Beyond these particular concerns, the military objects to the reduction in its role and influence in national security policy. Gorbachev has sought to institutionalize limits on the military's role by restructuring the state apparatus dealing with security issues:

- The locus of decisionmaking has shifted to the newly established, civilian-oriented Presidential Council, within which the formerly powerful Defense Council apparently functions as a subcommittee.
- The creation of a Committee on Defense and Security Affairs in the Supreme Soviet has opened defense policy generally and the military leadership specifically to greater public oversight and pressure to reform.

The effect of these developments has been to reduce the influence of the High Command to its lowest level since Khrushchev. The emergence of democratic forces within the Soviet political system will make it even harder for the military to reassert its claim on resources and prevent other elements in society from exerting influence on security policies.

A Military Cabal?

Not surprisingly, as military leaders have become more vocal in their concerns about the ills confronting the system and the military, rumors of a possible military coup against Gorbachev have become more prevalent. Although many of these rumors may be self-serving--by the military as an indirect means of putting pressure on Gorbachev, or by Gorbachev as an attempt to portray himself under siege--they reflect the uncertainties of an increasingly chaotic economic and political landscape.

Despite the increase in military disenchantment with Gorbachev's policies, and barring "catastrophic deterioration" of the Soviet economic and political system, we judge the possibility of a military coup against Gorbachev to be low. A number of factors militate against an attempt by the military to oust Gorbachev:

- Gorbachev's success in reducing the military's role in the centers of decisionmaking.
- The creation of a presidential system that further strengthens Gorbachev's control over the military and for the first time requires the use of "unconstitutional means" to replace the President.
- The continued pervasiveness of the KGB and other organs of oversight throughout the military.
- The military's professional aversion to acting in a Bonapartist fashion.
- Fear within the military of an internal split if it attempted a seizure of power and of active resistance from large segments of the country.

Although the military is unlikely to move against Gorbachev, it will not hesitate--especially in the more open policymaking environment--to make its views on

security issues clear and seek common cause with other more traditional elements within the leadership. The emergence of such an orthodox alliance could slow or even halt many of the reforms Gorbachev is seeking to introduce into the management of defense and security affairs.

Gorbachev's recent gestures toward the armed forces indicate his awareness of the need to placate military interests. He recognizes that he must be careful not to give the appearance of trampling too openly on the military's interests. He will continue to give weight to their views on many military-technical issues that loom large during the endgame of arms control negotiations. He also probably shares the military's concerns on such issues as domestic order--his stance toward Baltic independence likely has reassured the High Command. At the same time, his basic approach to political, economic, and military reform will keep him at odds with the senior military leadership.

Implications for Military Effectiveness

The military is confronted by a host of problems which threaten its capabilities to perform its missions. Already reeling from the effects of force and budget cuts, losses in influence and prestige, and the need to cope with unwelcome doctrinal changes decreed by the political leadership, the High Command is now faced with growing problems of troop morale, discipline, and reliability spawned by the current societal turmoil.

The military can still be relied upon to defend the territorial integrity of the USSR and undertake external combat operations if ordered to do so by the political leadership. Its ability to quell domestic disturbances is, however, considerably more limited than its numbers would suggest:

- Forces capable of handling domestic duties--internal security troops and the military's airborne divisions--are relatively few in number and are already spread thin. Most military units are ill trained and ill equipped for such duties; the use of what are largely conscript forces likely would only exacerbate tensions.
- Ethnic problems in the military will increasingly impair the commanders' ability to control troops in a domestic crisis. Use of force against Slavs generally and Russians particularly would be very risky.
- The military leadership does not want the role of domestic policeman, as this conflicts with its primary combat mission and pits it against the populace. Even so, the ongoing domestic turmoil will likely lead the leadership to call increasingly upon the military to perform such a role.